

ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR EMERGENT BILITERACY IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE OF A FIVE -YEAR OLD CHINESE GIRL IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

This is a descriptive case study of a five year old Chinese child s language and literacy development in Chinese and English within a tutoring context . Different assessments were conducted and analyzed with regard to words /characters she recognized in isolation with automaticity (sight vocabulary) , words /characters she recognized with the context of sentences she created when making up stories for the wordless books (context vocabulary) , and words /characters she failed to read even when presented with a context (oral only vocabulary) . In presenting the assessment procedures used we offer teachers and researchers new ways of evaluating the development of bilingual and biliteracy for English and Chinese .

Key words

emergent biliteracy ; assessment ; English ; Chinese

1 . Introduction

This paper focuses on the assessment processes used in a descriptive case study of a five year old Chinese child s language and literacy development in Chinese and English . The first authored tutored the child s English and Chinese for ten weeks using ten different wordless picture books . Assessment information with regard to English words and Chinese characters were conducted to find out if the child could automatically identify English words and Chinese characters when presented in isolation (sight vocabulary) . The child was also assessed on her ability to read on sight English words and Chinese characters when presented in the context of sentences she had created when making up stories for the wordless books (context vocabulary) . The third area of results is those English words and Chinese characters the child could not read when they were presented in the sentence contexts she had created (oral only vocabulary) . The purpose across these assessments was three fold . (1) What developed with the child s oral language in English and Chinese ? (2) What developed with the child s oral vocabulary versus reading vocabulary development in English and Chinese ? (3) What developed with the child s use of graphophonic cues writing in English ?

2 . Context

Just like teaching any academic subjects or skills , literacy instruction is informed by literacy assessments (Helman 2005) . Carefully designed literacy assessments help identify students problems in literacy development and inform what kind of instruction is needed . In this research project , we carried out different assessments before , during and after the tutoring sessions . The purpose was to document and understand how a Chinese child s emergent Chinese and English biliteracy abilities developed within the

experience of making up stories for wordless pictures book . In the following part , we want to clarify some terms that were used in this paper .

Assessment differs from testing . According to Graves , Juel , and Graves (2006) , assessment focuses on ongoing evaluations and is used to guide instruction , whereas summative test evaluates students achievements and usually comes at the end of the study . In this research context , we use the definition that assessment is “the systematic process of gathering information about students” (Mariotti & Homan 2005) . The ongoing assessment results were used to monitor the growth and achievement of the child and to inform our instruction .

The term emergent literacy was first introduced by Marie Clay (1967) to describe the process of children becoming literate , and it emphasizes that children learn by being involved or participating in any kinds of literacy activities themselves , such as holding books , reading from left to right , and realizing word-meaning relationships from exposure to print . According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) , emergent literacy is composed by phonological processing skills , print awareness , oral language skills , and emergent writing . Since emergent literacy refers to children's development of literate skills in one language , emergent biliteracy refers to children's literate competencies in two languages , to whatever degree , developed simultaneously or successively (Dworin 1998) . In this study , we assessed the child's print awareness , oral language skills , reading and writing skills in both English and Chinese using wordless picture books .

Invented spelling refers to writings children did following “a more or less phonological , rather than orthographic , strategy” (Whitehurst & Lonigan 2001) . Invented spelling is used to describe children's early stages of spelling development . Research showed that children who were encouraged to do emergent writing activities outperform those who were not (Clarke 1998 ; Torgeson & Davis 1996) . Invented spelling is usually associated with alphabetic languages , but Buckwalter and Gloria Lo (2002) used invented spelling to explore how a child developed writing in Chinese . They reported that the child went through three stages to develop writing in Chinese : writing either straight lines or crossed lines , writing discrete symbol units , and relying on visual memory to write characters or copying from adults' writing .

Wordless picture books are “pure” picture books or the “almost” wordless picture books relying on illustrations to tell a story , and they offer a variety of topics , themes , and levels of difficulty (Jalongo , Dragich , Conrad , & Zhang 2002) . Many educators have used wordless picture books to support young children developing literacy skills (Avery 1996 ; Gitelman 1990 ; Read & Smith 1982 ; Reese 1996) . Because of the absence of print , it also made possible for ESL or EFL students doing reading and writing activities .

3 . Participant

The first author of this paper , Ran , is a graduate student from China in the department of language and literacy education at the University of Georgia . Ran met the participant Chaochao (pseudonym) , a five-year-old girl from China , when she volunteered in a kindergarten classroom near the university . Chaochao comes from a typical Chinese family : her father was a lecturer in the department of law in a Chinese university , and her mother accepted the job offer to work as a post doctor fellow in the field of biochemistry at the university . When Chaochao and her father first came to the US in the year of 2001 , she was only three and half years old . Her parents wanted Chaochao to receive a US education because they think children get more opportunities to develop creativity and thinking skills ; however , they were afraid that at the age of three and half , Chaochao was too young to learn both the languages well . So Chaochao and her father went back to China and chose to move to the US when she was five , an age that children can speak and understand well in their native language .

According to Chaochao's parents , Chaochao has been engaged in literacy activities in Chinese since she was one and half years old . She was able to recognize but not write about 200 Chinese characters before the age of three , and she had learned the names of human body parts , how to greet people , how to ask and answer questions about her age and name in English before she came to the US .

4 . Procedural Summary of Tutoring Chaochao

Ran and Chaochao met three times a week in the reading clinic at the university for about forty five to sixty minutes for ten consecutive weeks . Ten wordless picture books were used , one for each week . In

each tutoring session ,Ran had different reading and writing activities for Chaochao but the main task was to ask Chaochao to tell a story based on the book in both English and Chinese . Ran tape recorded all the tutoring sessions and transcribed Chaochao s storytelling in English and Chinese afterwards .

In the Monday tutoring sessions ,Ran presented the wordless picture book ,assisted Chaochao to label the pictures and to do a picture walk in English and Chinese . This prepared Chaochao to independently tell a story based on the book using whatever English words and Chinese characters she needed to express herself . After the session ,Ran replayed the tape ,wrote down the English words and Chinese characters Chaochao used in her storytelling onto index cards ,and transcribed Chaochao s storytelling in English and Chinese into sentence strips .

For example ,in week eight ,Ran presented the book Carl goes shopping by Alexandra Day to Chaochao . One picture in the book illustrated that a baby and a dog hide in a corner after they released all the animals from the cages in the pet department in a store . When describing this picture in English Chaochao said “ They go to . . .pet . The pet go out . They hide .” In Chinese ,she said “ 他们去买东西的地方。他们俩把这些东西都放出去。那些东西又跑又跳。” Ran wrote these two sentences into two different sentence strips and each individual words and characters into index cards .

In Wednesday tutoring sessions ,Ran first had Chaochao retell the story in first in English and then in Chinese ,and then she asked Chaochao to read from the index cards and sentence strips . After the tutoring ,Ran again wrote down the English words and Chinese characters Chaochao used in her retelling onto index cards and transcribed her storytelling in English and Chinese into sentence strips . In addition ,Ran also compared the English words and Chinese characters Chaochao used during storytelling on Mondays and Wednesdays from the index cards and sentence strips to see if she has developed her oral vocabulary .

In Friday tutoring sessions Ran repeated what occurred in the Wednesday sessions . Ran also had Chaochao practiced invented spelling in English and sentence making in English and Chinese . After the tutoring session ,Ran compared Chaochao s oral vocabulary she used during storytelling on Mondays ,Wednesdays ,and Fridays to see if she had developed a richer oral vocabulary and kept a record of her new vocabulary .

The Monday ,Wednesday and Friday tutoring cycle was repeated for ten weeks and ten different wordless picture books were used .

5 . Assessments

Ran carried out different assessments during the ten weeks tutoring process and used the results to inform her instruction .

Concepts About Print . Concepts About Print (CAP) has proved to be a successful indicator to examine children s behavior in order to see if non readers have become readers (Clay 1993) . In learning to read ,it is important for children to develop an understanding of “basic concepts such as a letter ,word ,sound ,drawing ,writing and reading ;hierarchical concepts such as collections of letters which make up words ,and collections of words which make up sentences ;[and] terms for position like first and last ,beginning or start and end ,and next ,when they apply within the directional constraints of the printer s code ” (Clay 1991) . Research showed that using wordless picture books is an effective approach to assess children s CAP (McKenna and Stahl 2003) . Paris and Paris (2001) developed a narrative comprehension assessment based on activities such as picture walk ,storytelling ,and prompted comprehension using wordless picture books . They found out that they could evaluate children s book handling skills ,engagement ,commenting skills ,and comprehension strategies by doing a picture walk .

At the beginning of the tutoring ,Ran observed how Chaochao held the book and asked her to point the front and the back of the book . During each tutoring session ,Chaochao was involved in the storytelling . Ran noted that Chaochao not only made comments about the pictures including the descriptions of the objects ,characters ,actions ,but also constructed her version of the story based on her understanding of the pictures using narration and dialogue . When presenting Chaochao the sentence strips ,Ran asked her to point to the beginning and the end of the sentences . Chaochao was able to

successfully complete these tasks ,which indicated that she had well developed print awareness .

English Alphabet Recognition . Letter naming is another important skill for children to become literate . McKenna and Stahl (2001) mentioned that there are two reasons for teaching young children letter naming . First of all ,fluent readers read by identifying the component letters instead of recognizing words as whole units . Secondly ,teachers need some means of referring to letters during reading instruction . Ran used the alphabet recognition chart (Appendix 1) from Assessment for Reading Instruction by Michael C . McKenna and Steven A . Stahl . In this chart ,letters are arranged in a non - alphabetical order and both capital letters and lower case letters are presented . When administering this assessment ,Ran presented Chaochao this alphabet recognition chart ,asked her to read the letters Ran pointed to with one hand ,and recorded her response on a separate copy of the sheet using another hand . Ran administered this assessment a few times and Chaochao was able to name all the letters correctly .

Chinese Characters Recognition . Chaochao s father mentioned to me that he had been teaching Chaochao how to read and write Chinese after school . He had been teaching her two Chinese characters from the Chinese first grade textbook every day ,and Chaochao s homework was to repeatedly write these two characters for about ten times . At the beginning of the tutoring ,we thought that it was important for us to briefly understand how many Chinese characters Chaochao could recognize . Since there are no published Chinese materials for us to use as assessment ,we decided to borrow McKenna and Stahl (2003) s method of doing the English alphabet recognition . Ran picked 24 Chinese characters from the first grade textbook and listed them in a piece of paper to create a Chinese character recognition chart (Appendix 2) . Ran administered this assessment in the same way as how she did the English alphabet recognition . Chaochao could read 21 characters correctly and she said that the reason that she did not know the characters 左(left) ,目(eye) ,足(foot) was because her father has not taught her these three characters yet .

Directionality . Directional learning is another skill that children need to know in learning how to read . Children need to learn what to attend to and in what order when looking at written language . Clay (1991) noted that asking children to read with their fingers provides an opportunity to track children s reading behavior such as left to right ,right to left ,top to bottom ,out from the center (right to left on a left page and left to right on a right page) ,and snaking (movement across a page in which one line is read left to right and the next line is right to left) .

In order to assess Chaochao s directionality in reading ,Ran wrote the English and Chinese texts in different orders to the sentence strips when transcribing Chaochao s storytelling . The texts in the sentence strips were in different orders :left to right ,right to left ,top to bottom ,snaking ,and vertical . It is worth mentioning that Clay (1991) did not mention texts provided in vertical order for children to read ,but Ran did it to the Chinese text because Chinese had the tradition to write texts in vertical order . During tutoring ,Ran asked Chaochao to read the English and Chinese texts with her fingers and observed that she could find the correct order to read both the English and Chinese texts ,which showed that Chaochao had well developed directionality in reading .

Reading Vocabulary . In this paper ,we defined Chaochao s reading vocabulary as the English words or Chinese characters Chaochao used during storytelling and was able to read when Ran presented to her using index cards or sentence strips . We categorized Chaochao s reading vocabulary as sight vocabulary and context vocabulary . Sight vocabulary referred to the English words and Chinese characters Chaochao recognized in isolation with automaticity from the index cards . Context vocabulary referred to the English words and Chinese characters Chaochao recognized from sentence strips . All the sentences were from Chaochao s story based on the wordless picture books ,and they provided a context for her during reading . In order to record Chaochao s English and Chinese vocabulary development ,Ran assessed Chaochao s reading vocabulary for three times :in the middle of tutoring in week five ,at the end of tutoring in week ten ,and two weeks after the tutoring ended .

In Friday s tutoring session in week five ,Ran presented Chaochao 166 English words that she used during storytelling . Ran first asked Chaochao to read these words from index cards and noted that she could read 54 words automatically from the cards ,which suggested that these 54 words (33 %) had

become Chaochao's sight vocabulary. Chaochao failed to read 112 English words from index cards, so Ran then presented her the sentence strips that had these 122 words in them. Ran wanted to see if Chaochao could recognize these words with the help of the story context. With the help of the context, Chaochao was able to read another 60 words. Therefore, these 60 words were Chaochao's context vocabulary, which covered 36% of the total (60/166). We named both the sight vocabulary and context vocabulary as Chaochao's reading vocabulary, so in this way 69% (33% + 36%) of Chaochao's oral storytelling vocabulary had become her reading vocabulary. The rest 52 English words (32%) that Chaochao failed to read remained to be her oral-only vocabulary.

In Friday's tutoring session in week ten, Ran assessed Chaochao's Chinese reading vocabulary. During the ten weeks storytelling, Ran calculated that Chaochao had used 300 Chinese characters orally. Ran assessed Chaochao's Chinese reading vocabulary in the same manner as she did the English one in week five. Chaochao was able to read 183 Chinese characters automatically from index cards and 69 characters with the help of context, which means that 61% of the Chinese characters had become her sight vocabulary, 23% of the characters had become her context vocabulary, and the remaining 16% (48 characters) was still her oral-only vocabulary.

Two weeks after the tutoring ended, Ran again assessed Chaochao's English reading vocabulary. This assessment was administered in the same way as how Ran did it in week five except that this assessment had a lot more vocabulary (252 English words total) which was the oral English words Chaochao used in storytelling during all the ten weeks. We calculated in the same way as in week five and found that 20% of the vocabulary (51 words) became Chaochao's sight vocabulary, 49% of the words (123 words) became her context vocabulary, and the rest 31% of the words (78 words) remained to be her oral-only vocabulary.

The percentage of Chaochao's English sight vocabulary decreased from 33% in the week five to 20% after tutoring was ended. However, her usage of English to make up stories had increased from a total of 166 words to 252 words, which indicated that she had developed a richer oral vocabulary to make up stories. In contrast to Chaochao's English sight vocabulary, the percentage of her English context vocabulary increased from 36% in week five to 49% after the tutoring. It showed that having a context was helpful for her in learning how to read English words.

Chaochao's Chinese sight vocabulary was 183 out of the total of 300 characters she used in storytelling, and this number exceeded Chaochao's English sight vocabulary. It indicated that Chaochao had greater fluency with speaking and reading Chinese. The fact that not many of her Chinese oral vocabulary had become context vocabulary (69 characters, 23%) was predictable because in Chinese memorization is the key to knowing a particular Chinese character. Context in Chinese does not help Chaochao to read characters as much as context does when reading English words.

Dolch/Fry Combined Words. Dolch wordlist and Fry wordlist are the two most commonly used wordlists to assess children's sight vocabulary. Dr. Edward William Dolch surveyed many children's books, and he compiled lists of the most frequently used words, organized by reading level. He made lists of 220 "service words" (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and verbs) and 95 nouns which occurred again and again in children's books. Later these words are known as the Dolch words. Ideally, all of the Dolch words should be known by the end of first grade. However, Dr. Dolch divided his list into different grade levels, which provided a sequence in learning these words (Lee, n.d.). Dr. Edward Fry compiled another list of 1,000 words which students need the most to develop a powerful sight vocabulary. The first 300 words make up 65% of all written material contained in newspaper articles, magazines, textbooks, children's stories, novels, and more (Retrieved April 30, 2007, from http://www.sad6.k12.me.us/read/Frys_Words.html).

Ran wanted to assess Chaochao's sight vocabulary using the commonly used wordlists, but Ran noticed that the Fry first three hundred words and the Dolch wordlists have some words that are the same, so Ran combined these two lists. Together they provided us with a list of frequently occurring words in English. The Dolch and Fry combined wordlist (Appendix 3) has 157 words on it. We used this list to assess Chaochao's reading of high frequency words using index cards during tutoring in week eight

and calculated the percentage that she read correctly. Chaochao could read 18 % of these 157 words automatically without any assistance, which meant that 28 out of 157 words became her sight vocabulary. Compared this number with Chaochao's English sight vocabulary in week five (33 %) and two weeks after the tutoring ended (20 %), it indicated that more sight vocabulary was known from Chaochao's storytelling for wordless picture books than from the Dolch/Fry list.

Invented Spelling. As I mentioned earlier, invented spelling refers to writing prereaders did using letters to represent individual sounds (Whitehurst & Lonigan 2001). Invented spelling was often presented in an idiosyncratic way, such as having only the first and last sounds of a word (e.g. *bd* for bird, *dg* for dog). On Fridays tutoring sessions, Ran had Chaochao practiced English invented spelling, and based on her invented spelling, we observed that Chaochao gradually developed the graphophonic skills in English writing. We wanted to report three findings.

In the first place, Chaochao could not distinguish the pronunciation of letters when they varied across words. This was evident from analyzing Chaochao's invented spelling done during dictation exercises. For example the letter *e* for Chaochao was heard as long / / as in *be*. During dictation when Chaochao wrote the word *big*, she spelled it as *beg*. Chaochao's phonemic awareness knowledge in English depends on the Pinyin system in Chinese. We provided some examples here:

Word	Chao's writing	Analysis
car	cr	ar — /ar/ , r — /ar/ . These two sound the same .
up	rp	The pronunciation of short "u" is close to the sound "r"
eye	ai	/ai/ is what "eye" pronounces
big	beg	"be" pronounces /bi/ , "g" pronounces /g/
all	oo	"all" pronounces similar to "o"
hand	hnd	"an" sounds like "n"
dance	dns	"ce" sounds /s/ in this word
table	taboo	/ble/ and /boo/ pronounce similar
hill	heo	"e" — / / , "o" pronounces similar to / /
read	rid	"ea" sounds the same like / /

Next, Chaochao changed the voiced and unvoiced pronunciation of "th" into /de/ and /s/. Chinese does not have the "th" pronunciation, so Chaochao's way of writing some of th-words she knew such as *them* into *dm*, *thing* into *sing*, and *three* into *sre* etc. showed that she depended on her knowledge of the Pinyin system used by Chinese to write English. See examples in the chart.

Word	Chao's writing	Analysis
their	dr	Her understanding : "their" is pronounced /deir/ .
them	dm	"them" is /deim/
they	da	"they" is /dei/
three	sre	"three" is /sre/
thing	sing	"thing" is /sing/
other	rdr	"other" is /rdeir/

Finally, Chaochao developed an understanding that the letter "c" and letter "k" both make the hard /c/ sound in some words. This is evident when comparing Chaochao's invented spelling in the second week with that in the sixth week. Examples are provided in the chart.

Words	2nd week writing	6th week writing
can	kn	cn
car	kr	cr

Words	2nd week writing	6th week writing
come	komn	com
close	klos	cloz
clean	kln	clln

It is worth mentioning that we did not assess Chaochao's writing of Chinese characters. Based on the information provided by Chaochao's father, he had required her to write two characters every day from the first grade textbook used in China. Hence, we made the assumption that Chaochao had already reached the final stage of relying on visual memory to write Chinese characters or copying what the adults wrote, to develop writing in Chinese (Buckwalter & Gloria Lo 2002).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we wanted to say that ongoing assessments were very informative to evaluate Chaochao's language and literacy development in the two languages. At the beginning of the tutoring session, the assessment results indicated the level of the child, so we were able to plan the tutoring to best meet the need of the child. For example, when Ran found out that Chaochao had mastered the English alphabet, she decided to focus on assessing vocabulary. In the middle of the tutoring, the assessment results informed us the biliteracy development of the child, so we could adjust the tutoring content. For instance, when Ran observed that Chaochao could use richer oral vocabulary in storytelling, she started to use wordless picture books that have more complex plots and require more oral vocabulary. At the end of the tutoring, the assessment results showed us how much the child had achieved. We discovered that providing a context, especially a familiar context such as the ones children created themselves, was very helpful for them learning how to read. We hope that our research is informative, and more teachers will use ongoing assessment as a way to inform instruction.

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Appendix 1 Alphabet Recognition Chart

B	d	x	m	v	c
R	s	l	f	J	z
G	q	e	M	R	h
I	L	b	A	F	g
H	n	j	p	T	y
A	g	Q	u	N	w
E	k	t	o	a	I
D	Y				

Appendix 2 Chinese Character Recognition Chart

大	山	水	上
下	一	二	口
左	小	学	梦
乔	高	十	目
足	中	木	猫

Appendix 3 Dolch / Fry combined word list

Preprimer	Primer	First grade	Second grade	Third grade
a (F1)	all (F1)	after (F2)	always (F3)	about (F1)
and (F1)	are (F1)	again (F2)	around (F2)	carry (F3)
away (F2)	at (F1)	an (F1)	because (F2)	cut (F3)
big (F2)	be (F1)	as (F1)	been (F1)	far (F3)
can (F1)	but (F1)	ask (F2)	before (F2)	got (F3)
come (F1)	came (F2)	by (F1)	both (F3)	grow (F3)
down (F1)	did (F1)	could (F1)	call (F1)	if (F1)
find (F1)	do (F1)	every (F3)	does (F2)	keep (F3)
for (F1)	eat (F3)	from (F1)	don't (F3)	kind (F2)
go (F1)	four (F3)	give (F2)	first (F1)	light (F3)
help (F2)	get (F1)	had (F1)	found (F2)	long (F1)

Preprimer	Primer	First grade	Second grade	Third grade
here (F2)	good (F2)	her (F1)	made (F1)	much (F2)
I (F1)	have (F1)	him (F1)	many (F1)	never (F3)
in (F1)	he (F1)	his (F1)	off (F2)	only (F2)
is (F1)	into (F1)	how (F1)	or (F1)	own (F3)
it (F1)	like (F1)	just (F2)	read (F2)	small (F2)
little (F2)	must (F2)	know (F2)	right (F2)	start (F3)
look (F1)	new (F2)	let (F3)	tell (F2)	together (F3)
make (F1)	no (F1)	live (F2)	their (F1)	try (F2)
me (F2)	now (F1)	may (F1)	these (F1)	
my (F1)	on (F1)	of (F1)	those (F3)	
not (F1)	our (F2)	old (F2)	us (F2)	
one (F1)	out (F1)	open (F3)	use (F1)	
play (F2)	saw (F3)	over (F1)	very (F2)	
run (F3)	say (F2)	put (F2)	which (F1)	
said (F1)	she (F1)	some (F1)	why (F2)	
see (F1)	so (F1)	stop (F3)	work (F2)	
the (F1)	soon (F3)	take (F2)	would (F1)	
three (F2)	that (F1)	them (F1)	write (F1)	
to (F1)	there (F1)	then (F1)	your (F1)	
two (F1)	they (F1)	think (F2)		
up (F1)	this (F1)	walk (F3)		
we (F1)	too (F2)	were (F1)		
where (F2)	was (F1)	when (F1)		
you (F1)	well (F2)			
	went (F2)			
	who (F1)			
	will (F1)			
	with (F1)			

F in parentheses represents Fry and the number shows the level in the Fry word list .

(...continued from p .97)

- 8) Do you often go to library ? Do you frequently borrow some magazines or reading materials in English ?
- 9) Do you often practice your spoken English with your classmates ?
- 10) If you are depressed on the failures in one or two examines , what will you do ?
- 11) Do you often exchange English learning experience with your classmates ?
- 12) Are you aware of the errors /mistakes in your English learning ? Can you correct them ? Give me an example .
- 13) Can you check and correct the comprehensions of the previous knowledge in the process of completing learning task ? Can you give me an example ?
- 14) Can you adapt your learning plan according to your learning progress ? How did you adapt it ?
- 15) Can you plan and adapt your learning time effectively ? How did you do that ?
- 16) Would you please tell me why you learn English ?
- 17) Do you think it important that learning English in a good environment ? Is your English learning affected largely by your English teacher , the quality of English class , the textbook and the learning atmosphere of your class ?